

Online child sexual exploitation team (OCSET) investigators course and digital scene search course

The development of two training course for the online child sexual exploitation team, focusing on locating, securing and interpreting digital evidence.

First published
18 September 2025

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Child sexual exploitation and abuse Digital Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Warwickshire Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Warwickshire Police
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Key details

Partners	Police Private sector
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	February 2024
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Offenders Victims Workforce

Aim

- provide investigators and search officers with the skills to locate, secure and interpret digital evidence, including IP address tracing, dark-web navigation, device triage, volatile-data capture, offender interviewing
- standardise digital scene practice to ensure that evidence withstands scrutiny in court and meets the information security (ISO) legislative standards
- provide capacity to ensure OSCET can effectively identify and investigate appropriate lines of enquiry

Intended outcome

- improve the training offering to all OCSET investigators and digital scene search officers
- improve digital competence to shorten investigations. By recording and triaging devices at the scene, officers can act on critical leads sooner and properly prioritise devices

- improve scene handling to enhance the evidential quality resulting in more cases charged, giving victims greater confidence in policing
- support an earlier intervention for the safeguarding of victims
- improve Warwickshire Police's capacity to ensure a reduction of demand on external digital forensics units and turnaround times for specialist digital media investigator (DMI) triage
- improve officers' confidence and wellbeing by providing them with continued professional development (CPD) opportunities

Description

Warwickshire Police's 2023 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) thematic inspection identified a skills gap for OCSET investigators and digital scene search officers. In response, the force conducted a review that confirmed there were no suitable digital investigation training courses provided by Warwickshire Police, the College of Policing, or the private sector.

A detective inspector wrote a business case and acquired the funding from the force learning and development budget. The funding covered course design, delivery fees, student abstractions, venue hire, and equipment. Warwickshire Police partnered with Equinox Training Ltd and Blue Light Digital to design the five-day OCSET digital investigations course and the two-day digital crime scene search course.

OCSET digital investigations course

Equinox Training Ltd worked with Warwickshire Police to design and deliver the OCSET digital investigations course. The bespoke course was designed from June to December 2023 through consultation and delivered by subject matter experts to enhance operational skills and abilities. The course, which is specific to Warwickshire Police's needs, covers a range of online offending, from dark web marketplaces to peer-to-peer networks and image-analysis techniques.

The training is delivered by subject matter experts and costs £750 plus VAT per delegate. On each course there is capacity for 12 delegates. The course runs over five days and was delivered to 12 investigators in Birmingham in February 2024.

Digital crime scene search course

Blue Light Digital followed the same design process to build a two-day digital crime scene search course. The training is delivered by subject matter experts and costs £500 per delegate. The course ran in March 2024 for all 14 staff (including supervisors and managers). The course was held in Wolvey, Warwickshire.

Governance and cost

Both courses ensured that every officer assigned to online child sexual exploitation work can capture, secure and interpret digital evidence first time. Project governance sat with the detective inspector, supported by a detective sergeant and the learning and development team. Both providers gathered end of course feedback and returned anonymised data to learning and development for storage on the force's training management system. The cost of running the courses was £9,000 for the OCSET digital investigations course and £7,020 Digital crime scene search course, totalling £16,020.

Diversity equality and inclusion (DEI)

DEI principles were embedded with inclusive design, language and terminology reflecting Warwickshire Police's standards. Cohorts were capped at 12-14 delegates to encourage participation.

Overall impact

Since the two courses went live in February and March 2024, every OCSET investigator in Warwickshire Police has completed the training. Staff feedback has been exceptionally positive with respondents feeling the content is relevant and will assist them in their roles.

There has been improved digital competence when investigating online child sexual exploitation (CSE). Officers are confident in their investigations, suspect management and interviewing of risk management of sex offenders. On scene, the team are efficient and confident in identifying digital opportunities, assessing a device state, seizing devices, prioritisation and working with DMIs to triage devices. This reduces the number of exhibits seized from an address, resulting in fewer submissions to digital forensics resulting in quicker turnaround times.

The team have a high crime detection rate in comparison to all other investigative departments in the force, reflecting the quality of staff and investment in training.

Learning

It is essential to conduct a venue planning exercise. For the OCSET digital investigations course, it was identified at late stage that the Wi-Fi would not be fast enough to cope with 12 students conducting internet heavy scenario training.

It was also assumed by Equinox that police laptops would be able to access certain websites for the training, which they could not due to security reasons. Therefore, a new location with capable Wi-Fi was required along with the procurement of 12 laptops.

Warwickshire Police pushed back on Equinox in respect of both matters. As the provider of the training, the force felt it was their responsibility to ensure they could deliver the training at a suitable location with the correct training equipment. This was agreed and resolved by Equinox who were responsible for any additional costs ensued.

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